

## ***BOBOS in Paradise***

### The New Upper Class and How They Got There

America has a new ruling class. According to pundit author David Brooks, the WASP elitists of old have been replaced by a new meritocracy where SAT's and resumes are regarded more than heredity, connections and believe it or not... money. Conservative writer for the *Weekly Standard*, Brooks explores the rise of a new upper class, yesterday's **bohemian** rebels and their collision with the **bourgeois** class, blending mainstream with counterculture. Coining the phrase "**BOBOS**" in his comic-sociological account, Brooks describes the young elite "only dimly aware of themselves as elite and unaware as yet of their capacities." Existing in the upper reaches of the economy, they are far from being theoretical bookworms, but scholars who pride themselves on metis.

Ironically, Bobos were taken aback by the lukewarm existence and complacency of the old establishment. Gone and despised are the days of flagrant materialism and hollow upper class style. Enter: pricey authenticity. This new class of educated elite tend to swarm together in latte towns such as Burlington, Berkeley and Boulder where they are permitted to be affluently successful and free-spirited, quotes Brooks, "Bobos have moved into bohemian haunts and infused them with bourgeois sensibilities, similarly diluted." Bobos have a tendency to go in for products the old moneyed classes would never purchase, and violently refuse to be "pawns in a mass consumer society." Combining the Bohemian pared-down culture with bourgeois sober achievement, Bobos are the first group that have found a way to be both authentic and spontaneous, creative and disciplined; industrious and prosperous.

Bobos tend to march under these paradoxical reconciliation banners which allow them to live like organizational men (women) while still fancying themselves as hipsters. The bobo lifestyle is full of reconciliation. Not to be confused with justification and far from contradiction, mind you!

Disenchantment with their triple figure incomes and fast paced urbonics, bobos flee to pursue their dreams which often include enjoying the revenues of their relatively short careers, relaxing with their bebe-bobos, reveling in the changing scenery of the seasons and living life as an extended hobby. With income levels far above the national average, bobos often enjoy simple pleasures but on larger scales. Finding ostentation disgraceful, retrochic is in. The archaic modernaire of the 60's era is to die for. "Bobos prize ancient things, whose virtues have been rendered timeless by their absolescence," Brooks writes, "These palm-piloting, cell phoning, SUV driving elitists surround themselves with reactionary, rootsy stuff." Bobos irreverent feelings for the establishment has nothing to do with their desires to hold onto objects d'wasps.

Preferring irregularly textured surroundings, all-terrain baby carriages, eclectic shops, cutting edge technology and campy artistic delights, bobos revel in playful environments. Guilty are they of precisely selecting just the right food/clothing/vacations/possessions to enrich the fabric of their lives, yet the spirit of one-downmanship seems to resonate through the walls and halls of a bobohome.

The buzzword, *one-downmanship* is probably the most differentiating factor of boboism. Opposed to keeping up with the Joneses, the educated elitists try to be slightly more casual than their neighbors in status symbol land. They attempt to achieve a more cultivated brand of status.

### **R U A BOBO?**

Do you believe that spending \$15,000 on a media center is vulgar, but that spending \$15,000 on a slate shower stall is a sign that you are at one with the Zenlike rhythms of nature? (maybe you're a bobo)

Would you spend a little more for socially conscious toothpaste—the kind that doesn't actually kill germs, but just asks them to leave?  
(and the money goes to a worthy cause?)

Would you love to work for one of those hip, visionary companies where everyone comes to work in hiking boots and glacier glasses as if a 400 ft. wall of ice were about to come sliding through the parking lot?

Do your frequent haunts include the utilitarian Restoration Hardware store, Pottery Barn, REI, Smith & Hawkin ? Do you know the location of every Starbucks (or similar coffee shop/bookstore or other zeitgeist-heavy institution) within a 10 mile radius of your home? (you're definitely bobo material !)

Does your newly renovated kitchen look like an aircraft hanger with plumbing? Do your sleek simple drawer pulls cost ten times more than the similar Home Depot version?

Bobos buy the same items as the proletariat but paying hugely inflated prices for all sorts of things that used to be cheap, i.e. "free range chicken breasts that were treated better than a movie star at a health spa", potatoes grown in the northern soil of France, \$50 for a plain white t-shirt; purchases that allow them to seem egalitarian and pretentious simultaneously.

The essence of the Bobo code is **not** to flaunt your wealth. Loosely based on Aristotle's distinction between needs and wants, a Bobo reasons that a \$25,000 kitchen with a stove that puts out as many BTU's as "the space shuttle rocket booster turned upside-down and a freezer so cold it approaches absolute zero at which all molecular motion stops is acceptable because you make food a need. On the other hand, a \$15,000 home-theatre system on which you watch movies is a want...which isn't acceptable and little more than showing off," quips Brooks. The same reasoning concludes that spending \$60,000 on a Range Rover is acceptable but spending \$40,000 on a Corvette is not. Tsk. Tsk.

Top of the list of leisure activities are top of the line vacations. Leisure time is all about pushing the envelope; surpassing the norm. And of course, *Serious Sportsmanship* requiring *Serious* equipment. They actually use Sports Utility Vehicles for Serious Sports. Serious torture-cations induce self-inflicted agony and pain and lead bobos to exotic locales with low amenities. High status adventure seekers "turn nature into an achievement course, a series of ordeals and obstacles to conquer," according to Brooks. Bobos prefer biking up the Continental Divide to experience the total spiritual manifestation of the elements vs. hedonistic spas at nurturing high end resorts. IMAX thrill seeking adventures are always preferable to these "travel snobs."

Brooks highlights bobos lukewarm stab at spirituality, defining the soul rush as flexidology -- the hybrid mixture of freedom and flexibility one on hand and the longing for rigor and orthodoxy on the other. Bobotistas prefer autonomy and solitude but are backwards looking, desirous to be ingrained in community.

Flocking to timber-rich mountains and laid back climates, this class prefer spiritual enlightenment yet Bobos are enslaved by their insatiable desire for freedom and diversity. They prefer the "familiar to the unknown, the concrete to the abstract, modest to the ardent, civility and moderation to conflict and turmoil. They appreciate comforting religious rituals but not inflexible moral codes and have the ability to accept what doesn't directly concern them. They aim for decency, not saintliness, prosaic goodness, not heroic grandeur, fairness not profundity," chides Brooks.

The new establishment, these knowledge workers, intellectual entrepreneurs, symbolic analysts are today's emperors. The successful intellectuals are able to rise above intellectual endeavors into the "social canopy where everybody gets to bathe in the golden light of each other's accomplishments." An overwhelming predominant goal is to be a panelist. On every panel possible. A la Brooks, "At the end of a bobos life, the one who sits on the most panels—wins!" Life is a never ending graduate school and series of aptitude tests and praise is the ultimate bobo currency. Cha--ching indeed.

This newfangled artocracy favor historical essays with pop-culture features and prize things such as old world tools, deeming them --"art." Due to their superior intellectualism, Bobos flock to positions in companies that applaud and welcome their brains as well as their artistic creative spirits.

Understanding views on pleasure, marketing, politics and beyond will require careful reading of the book. Brooks is a self-confessed Bobo, thereby giving him sufficient reason to be able to poke fun and get away with it at the same time!

This new hierarchy define our age. "Their culture is the atmosphere we all breathe," groks Brooks. Just look around, whether you like it or not, bobos have rubbed off on all of us.

